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ABSTRACT

Identifying risk and protective factors that serve as predictors of substance use is essential for developing effective prevention programs. Inconsistency in the data about the role of religion and spirituality as a protective factor for African Americans continues to exist. In this study, data were collected from 511 African American youth, ages 12 to 18, who attended a state-funded drug prevention program. Participants completed several questionnaires designed to identify risk and protective characteristics as well as the prevalence of their substance use prior to interventions. Overall, protective factors were more likely to predict substance use than risk factors, and church attendance was the only variable that consistently negatively predicted substance use. Suggestions are included for further research. (Contains 10 references and 5 tables.) (JDM)

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Predictors of Substance Use in African American Youths

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ABSTRACT

Identifying risk and protective factors that serve as predictors of substance use is essential for developing effective prevention programs. Data indicate differential substance use between African American youths and other ethnic groups. Also, risk and protective factors differentially predict substance use of African American youths and youths from other ethnic groups. Inconsistency in the data about the role of religion or spirituality as a protective factor for African Americans continues to exist. Data were collected from 511 African American youths, 12 to 18 years old, who attended a state-funded drug prevention program. Before programmatic intervention occurred, participants completed several questionnaires designed to identify risk and protective characteristics of the participants as well as the incidence and prevalence of their substance use. Overall, protective factors were more likely to predict substance use than risk factors and church attendance was the only variable to consistently negatively predict substance use. These findings point to the need for further exploration.

Drug use among adolescents continues to pose a serious health problem in the United States. Recent data from the Monitoring the Future Study indicate that over half (53%) of 8th graders reported using alcohol in their lifetimes, one in four (25%) reported having been drunk, and 14% reported having five or more drinks in the past 2 weeks (Johnston, O'Malley, & Bachman, 1999). Data consistently show lower rates of substance use among African American adolescents compared to White non-Hispanic and other ethnic groups. Monitoring the Future Survey show that alcohol use in the past 30 days for youths 12 to 17 years old was higher for Whites (20.9%) compared to that for Hispanics (18.9%) and African Americans (13.1%). Despite the lower rates of use during adolescence, studies also show that African Americans suffer more long-term effects than other youth do from using alcohol and illicit drugs (Dawkins, 1996). African Americans were significantly more likely to exhibit a 12-month dependence than Whites. Overall, these data provide evidence that African American youth are more likely than other ethnic groups to experience negative social and health consequences after starting a pattern of use despite the relatively low rates of initiation substance use. Subsequently, prevention programs are needed to change the trajectory of their lives in a more positive direction.

The identification of risk and protective factors associated with substance use provides useful information for developing drug prevention programs. Hawkins, Catalano, Miller's (1992) social development model is based upon the premise that prevention requires the identification of factors that increase the risk of problems developing while enhancing protective or resiliency factors to reduce these risks. Hawkins, Catalano, & Miller (1992) have identified several risk categories including community, family, school, and individual/peer. Protective categories include

individual characteristics, bonding, and healthy beliefs and clear standards.

While Hawkins, Catalano, & Miller (1993) use the category, healthy beliefs and clear standards; African Americans are more likely to refer to religion or spirituality. Researchers have found that spirituality and religion play pivotal roles in the lives of many African Americans. Taylor, Chatters, Jakody, and Levin (1996) found that African Americans attend more religious services, read more religious material, and seek comfort through religion and spiritual activities more often than Whites. Although the research shows that religion and spirituality are important sources of strength and aid for African Americans in times of distress (Boyd-Franklin, 1989; Gibson, 1982; Neighbors, Jackson, Bowman, & Gurin, 1983), inconsistency exist.

It appears reasonable that the differential emphasis placed on religion by African Americans support the need for culturally sensitive prevention programs that focus on the risk and protective factors reported by African American youths. Thus, the current data focus on predictors of substance use among African American adolescents to provide databased information for developing prevention programs.

Participants

Participants were recruited from area schools, churches, or community organizations to participate in a state sponsored substance abuse prevention program. Usable responses were collected from 511 African American, ages13-18 years with an average age of 16 years.

Before programmatic intervention occurred, participants completed several questionnaires designed to identify risk factors (e.g., low socioeconomic level, child of an alcoholic, neighborhood with drug use) and protective factors (leadership, church attendance), characteristics of the participants, and the incidence and prevalence of substance use.

Results

Analyses indicated variations among the significant predictors for each substance. Table 1 presents the significant predictors for cigarettes. The predictors for cigarette use included socioeconomic level, being the child of an alcoholic, attending church, leadership, friends caring about the use of cigarettes and other drugs. Table 2 presents the significant predictors for beer use. Gender, church attendance, leadership, and family and friends caring about the use of beer and liquor were significant predictors for the use of beer. Table 3 presents the significant predictors for wine coolers. Gender, neighborhood with large use and sales of substances, other risk factors, church attendance, leadership, family and friends caring about the use of wine coolers. Table 4 presents the significant predictors for use of liquor. Child of an alcoholic, pregnancy, member of a gang, church attendance, leadership, family caring about the use of wine coolers and liquor, and friends caring about the use of cigarettes, beer, and other drugs significantly predicted the use of liquor. Table 5 presents the significant predictors for marijuana use. School drop out, having been involved in the juvenile judicial system, neighborhood with large use and sales of substances, church attendance, and friends caring about the use of marijuana and other drugs significantly predicted the use of marijuana.

Table 1: Regression Analysis of Risk and Protective Predictors of Cigarette Use

Variables	β	p
Low Socioeconomic	.1458	.0008
COA	.1315	.0031
Church Attendance	- .1437	.0008
Leadership	.0942	.0378
Family/Friends care about Cigarette use	- .1825	.0282

Table 2: Regression Analysis of Risk and Protective Predictors of Beer

Variables	β	p
Gender	- .1030	.0362
Church Attendance	- .1206	.0054
Leadership	.1592	.0005
Family/Friends care about		
Beer use	-.5664	.0019
Liquor use	.2981	.0295

Table 3: Regression Analysis of Risk and Protective Predictors of Wine Cooler

Variables	β	p
Gender	.0875	.0554
High Risk Neighborhood	.1105	.0099
Other Risk Factors	-.0797	.0437
Church Attendance	-.0875	.0296
Leadership	.1071	.0118
Family/Friends care about		
Wine Cooler	-.3626	.0000
Marijuana	.2013	.0134

Table 4: Regression Analysis of Risk and Protective Predictors of Liquor Use

Variables	β	p
COA	.0825	.0554
Pregnancy	-.1603	.0027
Member of a Gang	.2724	.0000
Church Attendance	- .0935	.0247
Leadership	.1117	.0111
Family care about		
Wine cooler	-.1796	.0148
Liquors	.2517	.0557
Friends care about		
Cigarettes	.1795	.0260
Beer	-.2992	.0294
Other Drugs	-.1405	.0527

Table 5: Regression Analysis of Risk and Protective Predictors of Marijuana Use

Variables	β	p
School Dropout	-.1100	.0299
Involved in Juvenile	-.1275	.0120
High Risk Neighborhood	.0873	.0559
Church Attendance	- .1590	.0002
Family/Friends care about		
Marijuana	-.4457	.0000
Other drugs	.2889	.0001

Discussion

The central premise of this study was that identification of predictive and protective factors is important for the development of prevention programs. This is especially important for African American adolescents who show differential substance use from other ethnic groups. Also, previous research shows inconsistency in the data about the differential influence of risk and protective factors for African American youths. The results of this study yielded some interesting findings.

Protective factors had greater predictive value than risk factors and church attendance consistently predicted substance use more than any of the other predictors. The significant negative relationship indicates that adolescents who attend church are less likely to use cigarettes, beer, wine coolers, liquor and marijuana. This finding underscores the importance of incorporating a spiritual component in prevention programming for African American youths.

Church involvement was negatively related to substance use while leadership was positively related to the use of cigarettes, beer, wine coolers, and liquor. This finding is not supported by other evidence and difficult to explain. It is possible that leadership is associated with risk behaviors and, thus, related to substance use. This finding points to the need for additional research.

The finding of mixed results for the negative or positive predictor value of family and friends caring about substance use is confusing. In some instances, when friends cared about cigarette and beer use, they were less likely to use cigarettes and beer. On the other hand, when family and friend cared about liquor, respondents were more likely to use liquor. These contradictory findings need further exploration.

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